Article V. The Offer of a Wife

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This type of "marital" union can be more readily and clearly explained by an example than by a long description. Suppose that a man named Eale is in need of valuables to terminate some sort of palaver (pertaining to a debt, a fine, an indemnity, a bride price to be paid, etc.). Since he has none and the matter is urgent, he borrows from Ekamba and offers him his daughter Wětsi. This offer is the means of persuading Ekamba to give the valuables Eale has requested. As a result Wětsi belongs to Ekamba, who now has a husband's rights over her. She is not a slave. She could be called a security, but that is not the name used by the Nkundó. They have a term which specifically designates this status, boóngá.

The term boóngá is used by all the tribes under discussion. (1)

1. Also among the Ekonda, although in keeping with the general rule of dialect variation they say bowóngá.

The Injólo alone call such a woman simply wǎji ôâ njélá, "a wife that was brought," and therefore taken without a bride price and without the husband's initiative. The expression used for "to give a woman in boóngá "is kúndela Ekamba boóngá. It reveals the origin of the term. Boónga actually signifies a piece of wood, a switch. In this case the reference is to a moderately thick branch which is placed across a small well and which, when attached to another stick of a different thickness, can function as a lokolé. Kúndela is a form of kúnda ("to hit," "to strike") which expresses the relationship with an indirect object. Thus the original meaning of the expression is "to strike the boóngá in order to get someone to help." The mention, not of the lokolé, but of its substitute, is intended to express the fact that a given individual is at an impasse and is asking for the means to extricate himself from it. The matter is serious and urgent; he hasn't time to look for the proper instrument, but in [122] his haste he must be satisfied with the first means he sees by which he can call someone who might save him from his distress.

426 583f Another expression used is foma losɨka, fomela N. losɨka, "to strike a losaka," that is, a clapping of the hands. The idea involved is the same as above: a man who sees no way out of his difficulties is represented as clapping his hands to attract the attention of someone who can help him. His action is a call for help. Therefore the term losɨka is sometimes used to designate the woman, through the same type of analogy that leads to the use of the word boɗngɨ.

Although the husband has full conjugal rights over the boɗngɨ and her activities, she is not strictly speaking his wife. It may simply be said that she belongs to him, and the fact that she belongs to him gives him the rights of a so-called husband. He has no obligations toward her, as he would have in an ordinary marriage. Thus in the example given above, if the woman dies while living with Ekamba, her father has no claim, even if no bride-price payment has been made, because he gave his daughter to Ekamba on his own initiative. If the boɗngɨ runs away from her owner he is entitled to a normal reimbursement of the valuables lent by him and to an additional 10 to 20 rings (or more, in proportion to the size of the loan) as damages for his loss. This supplement is due him even if he has paid a bride price to the woman's father for a legitimate marriage.

For if he loves this woman there is no reason why he cannot marry her properly. He will be especially willing to do so because as long as she remains simply a security, she is viewed with contempt and mocked by her fellows. They say, "You are not a wife, you are only a boɗngɨ; there is no difference between you and a slave, for your husband has not paid a bride price for you."

Once the bride price is paid the boɗngɨ becomes a real wife, and all the rules of law are applicable to this [212] union, which from then on is a normal marriage in every way comparable to a marriage by nkumbɗ. As to the loan, it is then included in the total amount of the bride price.

426 583 675 The pawning of a woman is also carried out through the mediation of a ndonga who, however, bears a special name, ndonga ɛ̂â ntsíkoɗnda, which is literally translated as "witness of I have not asked you." He is thus contrasted with a ndonga in the usual sense for the

426 583* 675 following reason: a true ndonga is designated by the husband while, in this instance, on the contrary, the intervention is requested by the girl's father. Consequently, a man who takes a boɔ́ngɛ́ as security against a loan is not obliged to recognize him as a proper official witness. This witness is not a ndonga of a marriage, but he must bear witness to the security agreement.

When a woman given as boɔ́ngɛ́ ran away from her owner, the latter attacked the ndonga and, if he found an opportunity, made him prisoner. If the matter were not settled, he could reduce the ndonga to slavery. But if he did so, he had to expect vengeance on part of the ndonga's family, although, according to the usual and legitimate norm, their vengeance should rather be directed against the man who asked for their relative's intervention. For it is he who is responsible for everything and who rightly should bear all the consequences. The exception, which sometimes really occurred, was due to the idea that "might is right" which, here as in "civilized" countries, is often true. (1)

1. This situation is not the only one in which a ndonga ɛ̂a ntsikoofida participates. The intervention of such a person may also be required under other circumstances. For example, Esalɛ́ of Bonkoso was taken prisoner by Isia of Bongíli. Mpetsí was related to Esalɛ́ and bound by friendship to Isia. He begged the latter to give Esalɛ́ back his freedom and guaranteed the payment of the ransom; he thus became a ndonga ɛ̂a ntsikoofind. If the payment is delayed too long, Isia will take vengeance upon Mpetsí and even has the right to abduct his wife as compensation.

When a man who has received a boɔ́ngɛ́ wants to marry her properly he designates his own ndonga, who must fulfill [213] all the conditions required. Thus the ndonga who participates in the pawning is not the ndonga of the marriage. However, since the former has

426 participated in handing over the boóngɛ́, he is usually allowed the 585 honor of being a supplementary witness to the chief ndonga. 675

Everything that has been said shows clearly that the offer of a boóngɛ́ may in no way be considered a marriage, even though it has some of the external characteristics of a marital union.

A very similar practice but one which now belongs to the past is that of offering a woman in begging for peace (boóndo). The following is an example from history: (1) At the time when the peoples

1. We are giving this story in detail because it is a living illustration of certain manifestations of Nkundó social life.

now living in this area were still settled near the sources of the Ikelemba, there was a war between the families of Mpumo, ancestor of the Boóndɛ́, and Lonyango, ancestor of the Bonkoso. The latter, defeated, called for help from the family of Bokungɛ́, their bonankúnɛ́ and one of the ancestors of the Bongíli. Bokungɛ́'s family inflicted a stinging defeat on Mpumo.

Mpumo was frightened and begged for peace, offering Bokungɛ́ his sister Mbɛ́laka. Bokungɛ́ accepted. But since he liked this woman, he wanted to contract a regular marriage with her. Therefore he paid a high bride price. But as Mbɛ́laka was of a good family, she declared that she did not want to go to her husband alone and insisted that her father send an ebísa with her. (2) Her relative Wela of Ngombe

2. See Chapter VII, Article IV.

(Boímbo) was assigned to her. But the old father, wanting to show off his wealth, went even further and added a second ebísa, namely Éuɛ́ɛ́, daughter of Bokelɛ́ of Bokótola, his maternal uncle. Finally, to complete this already ample dowry, Mpumo gave his daughter several men who were Mpɛ́mɛ́ (dependents) "to work the bellows in Bokungɛ́'s iron foundry." [214] Among them, according to the story, were Bokuka, Líkitɛ́, Engota, Lofalanga, and others.

426 583 675 Similarly, Mpumo received Lifomf, daughter of Ikɔ́lɛ́ as a bɔ́ɔndo. Her brother, Ndyɛ́ntikala, ancestor of the Mbɛ́ngɛ́ (Lisko, Ekonda), offered her to Mpumo in asking for peace. Mpumo married her in the regular manner. In his fight against the Ekonda this same Mpumo in the same manner obtained Bɔ́ɔngɔ́, the sister of Bangɔ́ndɔ́ of Mpɛ́njwɛ́ (Wɛ́yɛ́).

Since the victor in war usually wanted to marry the woman in the proper fashion by paying a bride price, the handing over of a relative as bɔ́ɔndo may be compared to the practice common in Europe in the Middle Ages, when a prince would marry his daughter or sister off to a competitor or an adversary to seal the peace between them. In both cases, therefore, a kind of political marriage is involved.

Article VI. Exchange

583x 184 When they speak of the exchange of women (yɛnjɛ́, from the verb enja, "to exchange" in general), the tribes under discussion do not all refer to the same thing. According to the situation, several types of exchange may be distinguished.

1) The pure Nkundɔ́ have a practice of exchanging daughters, sisters, relatives. This exchange is always carried out through the payment of bride price and the agency of a ndonga. Thus two regular marriages by nkumbɔ́ are involved, and the term "exchange" is only very inappropriately applied to them. The two men who give each other their sisters in marriage are each contracting an ordinary marriage according to the usual norms.

2) Sometimes the term "exchange" is applied to the practice of ikɛ́kelo, which is better explained through an example than by a long discussion. Suppose that Eale marries the woman Ámbɛ́, Lokio, Eale's sister, [215] is married to Isia. Ámbɛ́ leaves her husband for one of Isia's relatives. At the first opportunity Eale detains his sister Lokio at his home, thus taking her from her husband, and since his wife Ámbɛ́ does not return to him, he hands his sister Lokio over to another man in marriage. Or suppose that Eale has married one of Isia's relatives, and Isia has married a relative of Eale. If one of the wives leaves her

200 [547] Unfortunately the system was not continued. Also, it must not be said that it would be unjust to lower the price of the women. Rather, injustice would thus be redressed, a degenerate custom be improved. Through the present system, ever more injustice is committed and suffered.

583 A few polygynists would suffer some material loss through
595 the lowering of the price of the women, namely, by receiving less for one woman than they (sometimes) paid for them, for they inherited most of the women. But they are also the ones who are responsible for the irregular situation. In a large part of the district, the polygynists are by far the minority of the population. They are the ones who are hostile to the Colonial Administration. They are in possession of the women and have a monopoly on them. They fix prices which a young man can almost never pay, namely, two nkesi at least.

583 The difficulties for Christian marriages become daily still more difficult. This is true for the marriages already entered into and for the future marriages.

583 The bride price to be paid for the wife ought to be such that
429 every young man can pay that sum with his own money, with the
436 money that he has earned himself by his work. This sum cannot
[465 be high, for the ordinary working man in the Congo, who makes up
511] the large part of the population, does not earn much more than what he needs for board and clothing. Therefore to pay an excessively large sum as a bride price forces him to borrow and to run up debts among his relatives and friends. The result of this is that the system of the Nkita goes over unnoticed into the Christian marriages, and the woman remains an object for inheritance. Indeed, when the man dies the creditors will come, namely, those who have loaned him money -- and demand the wife. The disputes over the bride price then begin anew, and they will again give the wife in marriage in return for a new bride price. Thus, there is no end to it. The wife, the mother, will never achieve any rights but will always remain an object of inheritance. There has been talk about declaring the widow free at the death of her husband in order to prevent the inheriting of wives, but how will it be possible to [548] achieve that if the bride price is not lessened, considerably lessened? When a

young man can pay for his wife, or rather pay her bride price with his own earned money, then that wife becomes his property. At his death, no creditors or mortgage holders can come to demand the wife since she will then actually be free. There will also be no difficulty in making her heir to the property of her husband, for herself and her children. The bride price or payment for wives among the civilized Blacks could be very much simplified. To abolish it would not be so easy. Indeed, it seems to be in the customs and the habits of the whole Black race. Then too, with respect to bride price, usually still in entanglements with their heathen relatives.

The bride price, as it exists among the heathens, will always remain a source of difficulties for civilization and a support for polygyny.

When the price is lowered, the large number of wives of polygynists will be seen to disperse and go to the men who have no wife. Thus, single marriages will be increased, and the district, whose population is greatly decreased, will become populated again. Lowering the price will also prevent women being paid for with women; and thus the trading of women will be hindered, since then the whole bride price can be paid in currency. It is also anticipated that the woman will become less a material object; and by changing the wife from an object of inheritance to an heiress, her moral value will be raised in her own eyes and in the eyes of the men.

In order to civilize the land, Christian marriages must be established. In order to establish Christian marriages, the impediments that stand in the way must be removed, and everything be put to work to benefit what the good outcome of that can assure.

[549] Family Nomenclature

The name of:	is given to:
Ise, father	one's own father brothers of the father sons and grandsons of father's sisters